


How to Ace Anthropology Optional: Book list and Basic Plan

By Anudeep Durishetty | February 11, 2024

229 Comments

Note: There a total of 3 blog posts on Anthropology. This first article primarily talks about my book list and the basic approach I followed. The [second](#) and [third](#) articles deal with topic wise detailed plan for Paper I and II respectively.

Marksheet



UNION PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

CIVIL SERVICES (MAIN) EXAMINATION, 2017

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ROLL NO. : 0156266

NAME : DURISHETTY ANUDEEP

MARKS OBTAINED

SUBJECTS	MARKS
ESSAY (PAPER-I)	155
GENERAL STUDIES -I (PAPER-II)	123
GENERAL STUDIES -II (PAPER-III)	123
GENERAL STUDIES -III (PAPER-IV)	136
GENERAL STUDIES -IV (PAPER-V)	095
OPTIONAL-I (ANTHROPOLOGY) (PAPER-VI)	171
OPTIONAL-II (ANTHROPOLOGY) (PAPER-VII)	147
WRITTEN TOTAL	950
PERSONALITY TEST	176
FINAL TOTAL	1126

Remarks :-RECOMMENDED

Book List

These are the sources I referred to for my Anthropology optional. There is no need to read these books from end to end. You must go topic wise as per the syllabus and read these books to get a good grip over the subject. Apart from these, use online sources and newspapers to enrich your knowledge and answer content.

Paper I

1. Braintree material
2. Physical Anthropology – P Nath
3. Anthropology Simplified – Vivek Bhasme (very good source for diagrams and answer structuring)
4. Anthropology – Ember and Ember

Paper II

1. Indian Anthropology -Nadeem Hasnain
2. Tribal India – Nadeem Hasnain
3. Anthropology Simplified- Vivek Bhasme
4. The Tribal Culture of India – LP Vidyarthi
5. Xaxa Report
6. January 2014 edition of Yojana- Tribal and Marginalized Communities

Note on diagrams and answer writing

While preparing for CSE 2017, because of my hectic work schedule I was hard pressed to just finish the syllabus in the limited time I had. Because of this time crunch, I could neither make any topic-wise notes nor opt for any test series. I learnt how to write good answers from the book *Anthropology Simplified* by Vivek Bhasme. Most of the diagrams I practised too were from this book.

Online Resources for Paper I and II

1. Khan Academy – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gUY5NoX1Lk>
2. Anthropological Theories: <http://anthropology.ua.edu/cultures/cultures.php>
3. Genetics: <http://learn.genetics.utah.edu/>
4. Anthropological Survey of India: <https://ansi.gov.in/>
5. Ministry of Tribal Affairs: <https://tribal.nic.in/>
6. Tribal faces of India- <https://tribal.nic.in/DivisionsFiles/tribalFaces.pdf>
7. Govt. schemes and tribal related news reported in newspapers
8. **Diagrams** related to anthropology: I practised many diagrams from the notes of Kirthi Chekuri (AIR 14, CSE 2015) published in this [Insights article](#)
9. [Physical Anthropology slides](#)

Books for general reading

The following books have absolutely no bearing on Anthropology optional preparation. But for a curious student of this subject, these books are incredibly fascinating to read. Much ahead of me choosing Anthropology as my optional, it's these books that got me

deeply interested in the fields of evolutionary biology and genetics. Pick them up in your leisure time and I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I did.

1. Sapiens – Yuval Noah Harari
2. The Selfish Gene– Richard Dawkins
3. The Blind Watchmaker– Richard Dawkins
4. The Gene– Siddhartha Mukherjee



Anthropologist Jane Goodall with our Chimp cousin. This [NatGeo film](#) on her life is fantastic. Image credit: www.neverapart.com

Basic Plan

While you refer to the aforementioned booklist, these are some of the tips you should keep in mind.

1. If you are a complete beginner in Anthropology, your focus must be on gaining conceptual clarity and not on quickly completing the syllabus. Always remember that on the final day, it's your clear understanding of the subject that lets you write good answers.
2. In the booklist I mentioned, there's no need to read every book from cover to cover. When you are reading from a book, always have the relevant syllabus chapter/ topic and previous years' questions in mind. They will help you to stay focussed and will give you an idea of how much to study from each book.
3. For absolute beginners, Ember and Ember is a great book to start with. When I began preparing for Anthro in Jan 2017, I started with this book. I loved it so much that I read it cover to cover, even though such detailed reading is not at all needed from the exam point of view.
4. If you are making notes, they must be rich and comprehensive in content. For this, start with one standard core book, make notes from it and then add relevant content from other books.

I've dealt with this in detail in my subsequent posts to this article.

5. For both the papers, wherever relevant, quoting examples and illustrating with diagrams is absolutely pivotal. Paper I must have tribes names from the rest of the world. Ember and Ember is rich resource for many such examples but the pity is that there's no way to memorise them except by rote. Collect such examples in an A4 sheet and revise over and over.
6. Attempt as many Physical Anthropology questions as possible. They are largely static with immense scope for diagrams. You shouldn't go wrong on those.
7. Use internet and YouTube extensively for understanding Physical Anthropology concepts (especially Genetics). You can find very good explainer videos and documentaries. In your answers, wherever relevant, you can also write about the latest findings in the field. For example, in a topic like *genetic inheritance*, briefly mention about current research in epigenome, DNA methylation and how it affects gene expression.
8. Answer like a specialist. Definitions, introductions, criticisms must be scholarly. That is, you must mention Anthropologists' name, their work (year of publication too, if you can), its criticism by other thinkers. Examples: *a. Bronislaw Malinowski in his work "Argonauts of the Western Pacific (1922)" describes the importance of Kula Ring in the economic systems of Trobriand Islanders* *b. Franz Boas in his article "The Limitation of the Comparative Method of Anthropology (1896)" criticized the evolutionary approach and laid the foundations of Historical Particularism.*
9. For a particular concept, apart from the main thinker, try and quote works of other Anthropologists as well. For example: In Tribe-Caste Continuum of Paper II, everyone writes about Bailey, but if you can also substantiate your answer with works of Surajit Sinha on Maria Gonds, this will give your answer an edge.
10. Use internet and newspapers to collect good case studies to illustrate Tribal problems. Cram latest statistics pertaining to them. A thorough reading of Xaxa report is an absolute must for Tribal related portions of the syllabus.
11. Keep tabs on the latest news pertaining to Anthropology. It can be a new fossil discovery, launch of a new govt scheme for PVTGs, or a new finding in genetic research etc. When you read papers, have an eye out for such news and collect them in a separate notebook so that you can revise them before the exam.
12. Apart from reading books, dedicate adequate time to practise diagrams and label them correctly. Consistent practice helps you draw fast and draw neat.

Anthropology is a terrific subject to learn. If you put your heart into it, you can easily ace this optional. My best wishes.

Note: My book, [Fundamentals of Essay and Answer Writing](#) is an Amazon bestseller. Since its release, the book helped countless candidates master the art of crafting exceptional essays and answers and elevate their performance in the UPSC Mains Exam. You can [know about the book here](#).

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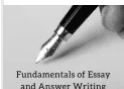
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[How to Ace Anthropology Optional: Deep Dive into Paper II](#)



[How to Ace Anthropology Optional: Deep Dive into Paper I](#)



[Tips for GS 2 Answer Writing in UPSC Mains](#)

229 thoughts on “How to Ace Anthropology Optional: Book list and Basic Plan”

Anonymous

November 2, 2023

Sir am beginner for UPSC preparation and i decided to go optional as anthropology, and am from arts background sir is it ok anthropology for me and without coaching is it possible to clear UPSC sir ,

Anonymous

November 8, 2023

Sir I want to know that you study anthropology yourself so take test series or not.

Priyanka Kumbar

May 2, 2024

Sir , I'm a dentist, an absolute beginner to anthropology.. should each and everything be ready from ember and ember as a beginner ???

Anonymous

May 9, 2024